Eco Radicals: the Legacy of Revolutionary Cooperatives

Community Syllabus

Community Syllabus (non-credit seeking students)

Wednesdays 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm ET
Dates: 08/26/2026 - 12/16/2026

FACULTY INSTRUCTOR

Prof. R. Trebor Scholz

tscholz@cyber.harvard.edu

Zoom Office Hours (Fall 2026)

[Office hour dates and times to be scheduled for Fall 2026 — plan for roughly one session every 3–4 weeks, mirroring the cadence used in prior semesters. Add the sign-up sheet link once scheduled.]

Students must sign up on the office hours sign-up sheet at least two days in advance. Last-minute sign-ups cannot be accommodated. There are no individual time slots. Multiple students may attend the same session and will be addressed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Invitation: Manhattan Greenway Walks

You are warmly invited to join me for morning walks circumventing Manhattan along the Manhattan Greenway Trail. We meet at 8:00 a.m. at the David N. Dinkins Municipal Building, across from City Hall. The full route is an all-day walk around the island, but there is no expectation to complete the entire loop. You are welcome to join for any portion and peel off at any time. For day-of coordination, you can reach me on WhatsApp at 646-707-4145.

Class Overview

A quick reference for the topic and date of each session; full descriptions and readings are in the Course Outline below.

Week	Date	Topic
Week 1	Wednesday, August 26, 2026	FOUNDATIONS
Week 2	Wednesday, September 2, 2026	FROM UTOPIAN SOCIETIES TO MODERN ACTIVISM
Week 3	Wednesday, September 9, 2026	LESSONS FROM SPANISH COLLECTIVES AND MODERN ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES
Week 4	Wednesday, September 16, 2026	THE RISE AND ROLE OF WORKER COOPERATIVES
Week 5	Wednesday, September 23, 2026	HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON COOPERATIVE THEORY
Week 6	Wednesday, September 30, 2026	COOPERATIVES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: CASE STUDIES FROM INDIA, KENYA, AND SOUTH AFRICA
Week 7	Wednesday, October 7, 2026	CLIMATE, CAPITALISM, AND COMMUNITY: PATHWAYS TO ECOLOGICAL LIBERATION
Week 8	Wednesday, October 14, 2026	MUTUALISM AS A FRAMEWORK: FROM PRE-CAPITALIST SOLIDARITY TO FUTURE LABOR ORGANIZING
Week 9	Wednesday, October 21, 2026	WORKER COOPERATIVES: A PATHWAY TO SOCIALISM?

Week 10	Wednesday, October 28, 2026	DEGROWTH, COMMUNITY WEALTH, AND LEGAL INNOVATIONS
Week 11	Wednesday, November 4, 2026	FILM SESSION: THE TAKE (2004)
Week 12	Wednesday, November 11, 2026	ROOTS OF SOLIDARITY
Week 13	Wednesday, November 18, 2026	SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT AND COOPERATIVE ECONOMIES
No class	**Wednesday, November 25, 2026**	**THANKSGIVING — class does not meet**
Week 14	Wednesday, December 2, 2026	POLICY FOR WORKER OWNERSHIP: INTEGRATING A COOPERATIVE GREEN NEW DEAL
Week 15	Wednesday, December 9, 2026	REFLECTION AND SYNTHESIS OF LEARNINGS: CLOSING CIRCLE + WHAT WE TAKE WITH US
Makeup	**Wednesday, December 16, 2026**	**Makeup session**

Course Description

"But early in the twenty-first century it became clear that the planet was incapable of sustaining everyone alive at Western levels, and at that point the richest pulled away into their fortress mansions, bought the governments or disabled them from action against them, and bolted their doors to wait it out until some poorly theorized better time, which really came down to just the remainder of their lives, and perhaps the lives of their children if they were feeling optimistic—beyond that, après moi le déluge."

— Kim Stanley Robinson, The Ministry for the Future

"Cooperation is the only sound basis for a democratic society."
— W. E. B. Du Bois, Economic Co-operation among Negro Americans (1907)

This seminar is more than an academic course. Eco Radicals is an invitation to engage with the cooperative movement and the wider solidarity economy as forces for change—practical experiments that show today the kind of fair and democratic futures we want to build. Cooperatives already involve nearly 10% of the world's workforce, but despite their socialist roots—roots that go beyond 1844 England and come from struggles all around the globe—they are not automatically liberating. Some cooperatives grow large but act like regular businesses, focused mainly on profit and ignoring justice in their supply chains. Others commit deeply to social values. Their real impact depends on how closely they connect to wider struggles for equality and justice.

Today, as we face the unraveling of natural systems seen in our weather, food, and future, along with the growing power of big tech companies and extreme economic inequality, cooperatives that settle for "business as usual" risk losing what makes them different. Neutrality is not a safe middle ground—it erases what sets co-ops apart. To stay relevant and transformative, cooperatives must join with the larger solidarity economy: unions, mutual aid networks, social movements, and grassroots campaigns—for Gaza, for LGBTQ rights, for racial and gender equity, and for human well-being in all its forms.

This is not a new idea. It is a reminder of how cooperatives began—close to unions, rooted in traditions of solidarity, and part of countless struggles around the world, from worker-occupied factories in Latin America to community-led initiatives elsewhere. It is also a pushback against U.S.- and Euro-centered histories that reduce cooperatives to a narrow story. In reality, co-ops have always appeared when other safety nets—governments, communities, even families—collapsed. They survive because they help people right now, not in some distant utopia.

Together, we will read foundational texts: Robert Owen's A New View of Society, W. E. B. Du Bois's writings on race and class in Economic Cooperation, and Kim Stanley Robinson's The Ministry for the Future. We will also engage with Troy Vettese and Drew Pendergrass's Half-Earth Socialism: A Plan to Save the Future from Extinction, Climate Change, and

Pandemics, alongside Peter Ranis's Cooperatives Confront Capitalism and critiques from Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg. Through these readings and discussions, you will gain tools to critically evaluate—and perhaps reshape—the economic and ecological structures around us. Join us as we return to these radical traditions and rediscover cooperatives, not as relics of the past, but as living forces for change today.

This course sees cooperatives not as the final goal but as part of a broader politics pointing toward democratic socialism. It is not a completely new idea, but a corrective—a call to return to the radical roots of cooperatives and to explore how solidarity practices, based not just on words but on lived action, can carry forward the unfinished project of democratic socialism.

Readings

We're aiming to broaden the conversation beyond the often U.S.-centered networks of scholars and tech activists, where many voices tend to circulate within the same references, by including a wider range of perspectives—especially from regions commonly referred to as the Global South or majority world. 1–2 required readings or resources per week, totaling not more than 10–30 pages.

Readings are listed below, week by week.

Evaluation and Certificate Requirements

For non–credit-seeking students, this course is offered on a pass–fail basis.
To receive a certificate of completion, participants must attend at least 12 of the 15 scheduled seminars. We recognize that many participants are working professionals, and it may not always be possible to attend every session. Everyone is welcome to join the seminars and contribute in any case, but the certificate will only be awarded to those meeting the attendance requirement.

No Writing or Presentations Required

There are no required written assignments or presentations for this course. Participants are encouraged to share their reflections, resources, and questions on Hylo, and to contribute in writing if they wish — but none of this will be graded.

Participation

Active participation in the seminars is expected. Arriving more than 10 minutes late will be recorded as an absence.

Discussion

For this class, discussions will take place not on Canvas, but on a cooperative platform called Hylo, which is value-aligned with our course. The private group we've created there will remain active beyond the end of the semester, allowing students to stay in touch after the course concludes. The discussion space is designed for starting conversation threads, sharing materials (such as articles, papers, and other resources), and posting your own writing—responses to course materials that others can engage with. Students are encouraged to respond thoughtfully to one another's posts. Participation in these discussions is mandatory for New School undergraduate and graduate students, and voluntary for community participants. However, all students—including those in the community section—must join the Hylo group.

Cross Connection Document

The course is deliberately designed to be fully accessible to you as an undergraduate student, while also engaging the expertise and perspectives of the other participants. Add yourself to the cross connection document.

The cross-connection document is designed to help you get to know your classmates and build connections. You'll use it to share information about yourself, and it will also serve as a resource for contacting other students for peer-to-peer learning, including exchanging feedback on your writing.

Presentation Slides

PDFs of lecture slides will be made available for download in this folder after each class, allowing you to review the material at your own pace and revisit key points covered in the session.

Pedagogy

This course follows a participatory, co-learning model inspired by Jacques Rancière's concept of the "ignorant schoolmaster," where knowledge is built collectively through dialogue rather than delivered from a single authority. Students read core texts together, pose questions, and

co-produce insights. Occasional guest speakers contribute to key thematic sessions. The expected time commitment is about 2 hours per week, including reading, forum engagement, and live sessions. Those seeking a certificate should plan to participate meaningfully throughout the term.

Course Flow

All readings are free, marked as Required and Suggested. Each seminar runs from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm, with a brief break. The first hour focuses on presentations and discussions of the readings—often led by graduate students—with undergraduates twice presenting contextual information on cooperatives and related concepts. After the break, practitioners and scholars join as discussants to extend the conversation, sharing perspectives from cooperatives around the world and exploring how they work toward ecological sustainability, integrating theory with practice and history with real-world applications.

Community Norms

This course is built on mutual respect, curiosity, and trust. Please engage with others kindly, challenge ideas without attacking people, and keep anything anyone is saying in class private unless you have permission to share it. Course materials may not be shared beyond the class. We follow the Robert's Rules of Chatham House, which means participants are free to use the information shared, but not to attribute it to course participants without their consent. This helps us create a space where everyone can participate openly and safely. Discussions will rotate between learners, and we ask that no one dominate the conversation.

Remote Learning Guidelines

- Video on: Required during sessions to support meaningful interaction.
- No cellphone use: Please join from a stable setup (laptop/desktop).
- No multitasking: This seminar demands your full attention—do not join while in transit, walking, or engaged in other activities.
- Use a headset if possible to minimize background noise and improve audio quality.
- Be on time: Arriving late disrupts the flow of discussion and shows a lack of respect for your peers.
- Mute when not speaking: To avoid unintended interruptions.
- Engage fully: Be prepared to participate actively through voice and/or chat, just as you would in person.

- Respect the space: Treat the virtual classroom as you would a physical one—be present, prepared, and respectful.

Policy on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Generative AI can be a helpful tool for learning—but only when used skilfully. While the temptation to pass off assignments to AI tools is understandable—especially for those for whom English is not a first language, or for whom academic writing is not part of their everyday practice—it limits the opportunity for meaningful learning that this course is designed to offer. Engaging with lectures, readings, and peer perspectives is central to building the critical thinking and analytical skills needed to articulate your ideas in your own voice.
When used thoughtfully, AI can function as a conversational partner for feedback—helping you test arguments, pose questions, clarify complex ideas, and improve drafts of your writing. It can support your learning, not replace it—and it should push you to engage more deeply with your own writing, prompting more frequent and rigorous revision. It should make you think more critically about your drafts.

Generative AI can be a useful tool for exploring ideas, refining your understanding, and clarifying course material—for example, by helping you examine a topic from different angles, identify relevant examples, or revisit points raised in discussion.

However, you may not submit work that is primarily generated by AI. Submitting AI-written material—especially without meaningful revision or critical engagement—is considered academic misconduct, akin to plagiarism. You are responsible for ensuring that all submitted work reflects accuracy, independent thought, and principled academic conduct. While relying on AI tools may be tempting—especially for those less practiced in writing—it undermines the learning this course is designed to support. Meaningful engagement with lectures, readings, and the contributions of your peers is essential for developing critical thinking, analytical depth, and a clear, grounded voice. Because AI can generate content that sounds plausible but may be false or misleading, you are responsible for verifying its accuracy and should consult me before using it in assignments if you're unsure.

COURSE OUTLINE

Throughout the semester, several guest practitioners and scholars will join the class to share their experiences and perspectives. These visitors will participate in discussions—not as lecturers, but as engaged contributors—helping to connect course themes to real-world cooperative practices and ecological initiatives. Their appearances at multiple points in the term provide opportunities to integrate theory with practice, expand dialogue, and explore how cooperative principles are applied in diverse contexts.

Week 1 (Wednesday, August 26, 2026)

FOUNDATIONS

This opening session is both practical and conceptual. It orients us to the course structure and tools while introducing fundamental ideas that will carry through the semester. Together we will:

- Review the syllabus (overview and short quiz)
- Fill in the cross-connection document
- Create a Hylo account (our group communication space)
- Complete the Student Needs Assessment Form

Alongside logistics, we'll establish a shared foundation for our work together. What is the solidarity economy? What are cooperatives? How do worker co-ops differ from consumer co-ops or producer co-ops? What are the cooperative principles, and how might they guide our thinking this semester?

Reading:

Solnit, Rebecca. 2016. "Looking into Darkness." In Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities, 1–8. 3rd ed. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Week 2 (Wednesday, September 2, 2026)

FROM UTOPIAN SOCIETIES TO MODERN ACTIVISM

The session will begin with an introduction to both thinkers (historical contexts and main ideas). This will be followed by a 25-minute deep dive into Robert Owen's "A New View of Society." Subsequently, another 25 minutes will be dedicated to exploring David Graeber's "Hope in Common." The session will then involve a group activity centered around real-world case studies that apply Owen's theories. The final 30 minutes will be allocated for a comparative discussion

and analysis, where participants will engage in a facilitated group discussion to compare and contrast Owen's and Graeber's ideas.

Required Reading:
Hope in Common by David Graeber (6 pages)
Upstream Podcast, Worker Cooperatives, Part 1 (58 mins)

Suggested Reading:
Worker Co-Ops Have a Role to Play in Socialist Strategy by Daniel Wortel-London
International Cooperative Alliance Statement on Cooperative Identity

A New View of Society by Robert Owen, Essays 1, 2, and 4 (69 pages)

Browse these cooperatives: Mondragon, Cooperation Jackson, Arizmendi Bakery, SEWA Cooperative Federation, New Era Windows Cooperative

Week 3 (Wednesday, September 9, 2026)

LESSONS FROM SPANISH COLLECTIVES AND MODERN ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES

In this session, we explore the historical and practical aspects of collectivism during revolutionary movements, focusing on two key readings. First, we examine Gastón Leval's "Collectives in the Spanish Revolution," specifically Chapter V: "The Aragon Federation of Collectives." This chapter offers an analysis of the collectivization efforts in Aragon during the Spanish Revolution, providing insights into how collectives were organized, functioned, and impacted the social and economic landscape of the region. Complementing this historical perspective, we then engage with "The Solidarity Economy: An Interview with Paul Singer." This interview provides a contemporary viewpoint on the principles and practices of solidarity economies, exploring how these ideas are applied in modern contexts and their relevance in today's global economic system.

Required Reading:
Collectives in the Spanish Revolution by Gastón Leval, Chapter V (pages 83-113)
Solnit, Rebecca. 2016. "Changing the Imagination of Change." In Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities, 113–22. 3rd ed. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Week 4 (Wednesday, September 16, 2026)

THE RISE AND ROLE OF WORKER COOPERATIVES

In this session, we explore the transformative potential of worker cooperatives in challenging and reshaping the neoliberal economic landscape. Drawing upon Peter Ranis's analysis in "Cooperatives Confront Capitalism," we begin by analyzing the reasons behind the emergence of worker cooperatives, as discussed in the initial chapter, "Why Worker Cooperatives?" This sets the stage for a better understanding of their role in the digital economy, as spelled out in "Worker Cooperatives in the Post-Occupy Digital Economy." Complementing Ranis's perspectives, we'll listen to the Upstream Podcast's two-part series on "Worker Cooperatives."

Required Reading:

Cooperatives Confront Capitalism, Challenging the Neoliberal Economy by Peter Ranis, Chapter 1 (pages 1 to 17)

Miles, Michael. "Black Cooperatives." The New Republic, September 21, 1968.

Suggested Readings:

Cooperatives Confront Capitalism, Challenging the Neoliberal Economy by Peter Ranis, Chapter 3 (pages 34-45)

Cooperation: A Political, Economic, and Social Theory by Bernard Harcourt, Chapter 1 (30 pages)

Upstream Podcast, Worker Cooperatives, Part 2 (58 mins)

Examples of anti-capitalist cooperatives:

Southwest Alabama Farmers Cooperative Association — In 1967, Black farmers from Alabama's Black Belt formed SWAFCA, pooling resources to fight land loss and economic displacement. They bypassed white power structures and became a model for grassroots economic empowerment.

Mondragon Corporation is a federation of worker-owned cooperatives based in the Basque region, founded in 1956; today it employs over 70,000 people across diverse sectors—including manufacturing and retail.

ULCCS – Uralungal Labour Contract Co-operative Society (Kerala, India) — India's oldest workers' co-op (1925), founded under reformer Vagbhatananda; large public-works builder that emerged from anti-oppression organizing.

Kerala Dinesh (Kannur, India) — Founded in 1969 as Kerala Dinesh Beedi under Kerala's communist government, this worker-owned cooperative has largely phased out cigarette production. Rooted in radical, pro-worker politics, it now focuses on food processing, garments, umbrellas, cafés, and IT services.

Cooperativa Integral Catalana – CIC (Catalonia, Spain) — explicitly anti-capitalist "integral" cooperative network (self-management, direct democracy, alt-currencies) aiming at a post-capitalist economy.

The kibbutz movement in Israel began in 1910, developing as a form of communal living influenced by Marxist-socialist ideals and aspects of Jewish tradition. Russell, Raymond, Robert Hanneman, and Shlomo Getz. "The Transformation of the Kibbutzim." Israel Studies 16, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 109–26.

Zapatista coffee co-ops (Chiapas, Mexico) — e.g., Yachil Xojobal Chu'lchan; indigenous co-ops explicitly aligned with Zapatista autonomy; export fair-trade coffee via solidarity networks.
Vio.Me (Thessaloniki, Greece) — workers occupied a shuttered factory and restarted it as a cooperative (ecological cleaners); assemblies, equal pay, militant lineage.

Rojava / Autonomous Administration of North & East Syria — region-wide cooperative economy (e.g., Hevgirtin retail co-ops) built under democratic confederalism; explicitly anti-capitalist, communalist framing.

Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Service are cooperatives, owned and governed by Aboriginal communities, that provide comprehensive, rights-based, and culturally grounded primary health care. Freeman et al., "Case Study of an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Service," 97.

Week 5 (Wednesday, September 23, 2026)

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON COOPERATIVE THEORY

This session explores the evolution of cooperative thought, beginning with Fourier's early 19th-century foundational ideas in "The Theory of the Four Movements," which lay the groundwork for cooperative principles. It then transitions to Bernard Harcourt's contemporary analysis, offering a reflection on Owen and Fourier.

Required Reading:

Cooperation: A Political, Economic, and Social Theory by Bernard Harcourt, Chapter 4

Azzellini, Dario. "Contemporary Communes and Council Democracy in Latin America." Socialism and Democracy 38, no. 2–3 (2024): 56–80.

Suggested:

Tej Gonza. "Chapter 5: The Slovenian Cooperative ESOP." In Expanding Employee Ownership Models in the US, UK, Canada, France, and Slovenia, edited by Corey Rosen, Graeme Nuttall, Jon Shell, Thibault Mirabel, and Tej Gonza, 33–41. Oakland, CA: National Center for Employee Ownership, 2025.

Gonza, Tej, David Ellerman, Kosta Marco, and Juri. "Democratic ownership: Scale through leveraged conversions." In The Routledge Handbook of Cooperative Economics and Management, edited by Jerome Nikolai Warren, Lucio Biggiero, Jamin Hübner, and Kemi Ogunyemi, chapter 16. London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2025.

Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph. What Is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government. Translated by Benjamin R. Tucker. 1840. Preface.

Week 6 (Wednesday, September 30, 2026)

COOPERATIVES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: CASE STUDIES FROM INDIA, KENYA, AND SOUTH AFRICA

This session investigates worker cooperatives in the Global South, focusing on India and South Africa. We'll analyze Timothy Kerswell's examination of Indian village collectivism in the face of

neoliberalism, alongside Andrew Emmanuel Okem's study of the cooperative movement in Africa and its application in South Africa.

Required Reading:
Worker Cooperatives in India by Timothy Kerswell, Chapter 6 (pages 115-141)

Suggested Reading:
Vieta, Marcelo, and Ana Inés Heras. "Organizational Solidarity in Practice in Bolivia and Argentina: Building Coalitions of Resistance and Creativity." Organization 29, no. 2 (2022): 271–94.

Theoretical and Empirical Studies on Cooperatives: Lessons for Cooperatives in South Africa by Andrew Emmanuel Okem, Chapter 2 (Pages 15-27), Chapter 7 (pages 71-81).

Week 7 (Wednesday, October 7, 2026)

CLIMATE, CAPITALISM, AND COMMUNITY: PATHWAYS TO ECOLOGICAL LIBERATION

This session explores ecological crisis and social organization through the lens of environmental accountability, cooperative practice, and collective futures. The required reading by François Deblangy moves beyond greenwashing to examine sustainable development as a question of responsibility, governance, and cooperation rather than market signaling. The suggested readings extend this analysis into speculative and systemic futures, with Kim Stanley Robinson imagining planetary-scale climate governance, and Troy Vettese and Drew Pendergrass proposing ambitious planning frameworks and ecological transformations oriented toward long-term survival. Together, these texts invite students to critically assess dominant approaches to sustainability and to consider collective, institutional, and systemic pathways toward ecological justice.

Required Reading:
Beyond Green-Washing: Sustainable Development and Environmental Accountability through Co-operators' Eyes by François Deblangy (pages 39-56)

Suggested Reading:
Robinson, Kim Stanley. "Chapter 1." In The Ministry for the Future, 1–18. New York: Orbit, 2020.

Vettese, Troy, and Drew Pendergrass. Chapter 3, "Planning Half-Earth." In Half-Earth Socialism: A Plan to Save the Future from Extinction, Climate Change, and Pandemics, 93–138. London: Verso, 2022.

Vettese, Troy, and Drew Pendergrass. Chapter 4, "News from 2047." In Half-Earth Socialism: A Plan to Save the Future from Extinction, Climate Change, and Pandemics, 139–176. London: Verso, 2022.

Week 8 (Wednesday, October 14, 2026)

MUTUALISM AS A FRAMEWORK: FROM PRE-CAPITALIST SOLIDARITY TO FUTURE LABOR ORGANIZING

This session synthesizes Sara Horowitz's theory of mutualism across history, ecology, labor, and self-organization. Drawing on her analysis of early mutualist practices, the development of mutualist ecosystems, and strategies for organizing the unorganized, the session examines mutualism as both a pre-capitalist tradition and a forward-looking framework for building economic security, collective power, and resilient social infrastructure beyond wage labor and market dependency.

Required Reading:

Horowitz, Sara. "Early Mutualism: The Ism Before Capitalism." In Mutualism: Building the Next Economy from the Ground Up, 43–70. New York: Random House, 2020.

Suggested Reading:

Horowitz, Sara. "Mutualist Ecosystems: Building Biodiverse Scale." In Mutualism: Building the Next Economy from the Ground Up, 101–132. New York: Random House, 2020.

Horowitz, Sara. "The Future of Labor: Organizing the Unorganized." In Mutualism: Building the Next Economy from the Ground Up, 179–206. New York: Random House, 2020.

Horowitz, Sara. "The Future of You: How to Build." In Mutualism: Building the Next Economy from the Ground Up, 245–268. New York: Random House, 2020.

Week 9 (Wednesday, October 21, 2026)

WORKER COOPERATIVES: A PATHWAY TO SOCIALISM?

In this session, we explore the intricate relationship between worker cooperatives and socialism through a detailed examination of key texts. Starting with Bruno Jossa's "The Political Economy of Worker Cooperatives and Socialism," we explore the materialistic conception of history, the role of democratic firms in transitioning to socialism, and the historical perspectives on cooperation in economic thought, as presented in the first three chapters.

Required Readings:

The Political Economy of Worker Cooperatives and Socialism by Bruno Jossa, Chapter 3 (pages 49-59)

Suggested Readings:

The Political Economy of Worker Cooperatives and Socialism by Bruno Jossa, part of Chapter 4 (pages 60-68)

Camila Piñeiro Harnecker (ed.), Cooperatives and Socialism: A View from Cuba (Introduction)

Chapter 7, "Mondragon: The Dilemmas of Mature Cooperativism" (pages 175-197)

Chapter 9, "Solidarity Economy in Brazil: The Relevance of Cooperatives for the Historic Emancipation of Workers" by Luiz Inácio Gaiger and Eliene Dos Anjos (pages 212-234)

Week 10 (Wednesday, October 28, 2026)

DEGROWTH, COMMUNITY WEALTH, AND LEGAL INNOVATIONS

This session explores concepts of commoning, community wealth-building, and the legal frameworks that support them. We begin by listening to the "Frontiers of Commoning" podcast featuring Janelle Orsi, where we explore the art of legal hacking to facilitate and protect shared resources and community initiatives. This discussion sets the stage for a deep dive into Bill McKibben's "Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future," focusing on the first chapter, "After Growth." Here, McKibben challenges traditional economic growth models and advocates for a shift towards community-centered economies. Complementing these resources, an interview with Kali Akuno provides practical insights and real-world experiences in building Cooperation Jackson.

Required Reading:

Interview with Kali Akuno (Jacobin, February 2019)

Suggested Reading:

Frontiers of Commoning podcast, "Janelle Orsi and the Art of the Legal Hack" (49 mins)

Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future by Bill McKibben, Chapter 1 (pages 5-46)

Week 11 (Wednesday, November 4, 2026)

FILM SESSION: THE TAKE (2004)

The Take, written by Naomi Klein and directed by Avi Lewis.

This session centers on The Take, a documentary examining Argentina's economic collapse in the early 2000s and the subsequent wave of worker takeovers of abandoned factories. Rather than focusing on abstract economic theory, the film documents how workers collectively reoccupied, managed, and defended their workplaces in the absence of state or corporate support. Klein and Lewis frame these experiments in worker self-management as pragmatic responses to crisis that challenge dominant assumptions about ownership, labor, and economic inevitability. The film offers a grounded case study of radical cooperation under conditions of precarity, highlighting both the promise and the limits of post-capitalist alternatives.

Film Discussion

The discussion will examine how moments of economic crisis open space for radical experimentation, asking whether collapse is a necessary condition for worker-led transformation. Students will consider how The Take challenges prevailing assumptions about private property and legal authority, focusing on the workers' claims to legitimacy, dignity, and survival. Attention will be given to how labor is redefined through collective management and what forms of work and care become visible in the process. The session will also critically assess the limits of worker control as depicted in the film, including internal tensions and the absence of supportive legal, financial, and institutional infrastructure. Finally, the discussion will explore whether the practices shown can move beyond emergency responses toward durable cooperative ecosystems capable of scaling and sustaining alternative economic futures.

Week 12 (Wednesday, November 11, 2026)

ROOTS OF SOLIDARITY

For this session, we will explore the historical and philosophical roots of cooperation and mutual aid. Our readings begin with Peter Kropotkin's seminal work, "Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution," focusing on the introduction by Graeber and Chapters 1 & 7. Kropotkin's text provides a critical examination of cooperation as a driving force in evolution. Complementing this, we will read selections from David J. Thompson's "Weavers of Dreams: Founders of the Modern Cooperative Movement," specifically the chapters "Revolution Comes to Rochdale," "From Utopian Community to Garden City," and "Toad Lane Yesterday and Today." These chapters offer a historical perspective on the development of the modern cooperative movement.

Required Reading:

Mutual Aid and the Roots of Cooperation by Peter Kropotkin, Introduction by Graeber and Chapters 1 & 7

Jessica Gordon Nembhard, Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice, Introduction

Suggested Reading:

Weavers of Dreams: Founders of the Modern Cooperative Movement by David J. Thompson —

Selected Chapters: "Revolution Comes to Rochdale" (pages 1-11), "From Utopian Community to Garden City" (pages 117-135), "Toad Lane Yesterday and Today" (pages 135-140)

Week 13 (Wednesday, November 18, 2026)

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT AND COOPERATIVE ECONOMIES

This session examines cooperatives as institutions of social empowerment, rather than ethical market actors or marginal alternatives. Drawing on Erik Olin Wright's framework of "real utopias," we explore how democratic economic forms can redistribute power, expand collective agency, and operate at scale within — and against — capitalist markets. Wright provides the conceptual tools to distinguish between reforms that stabilize existing systems and institutions that prefigure structural transformation.

Piero Ammirato's conclusion on Italian cooperatives grounds this theory in a concrete historical and empirical case. The Italian cooperative sector demonstrates how cooperative enterprises can achieve durability, resilience, and social responsibility while contributing to a more pluralist and democratic market economy. Together, these readings invite students to assess whether cooperatives function as vehicles of systemic change, mechanisms of embedded resistance, or hybrid formations shaped by ongoing tensions between democracy, markets, and state power. Key questions include: What does social empowerment look like in economic life? Under what conditions do cooperatives scale without losing their democratic character? And how should we evaluate cooperative success — by market performance, social outcomes, or transformative potential?

Required Reading:

Wright, Erik Olin. Chapter 6, "Social Empowerment and the Economy." In Envisioning Real Utopias, 123–152. London: Verso, 2010.

Ammirato, Piero. Chapter 11, "Conclusion: Toward a More Pluralist and Democratic Market Economy." In The Growth of Italian Cooperatives: Innovation, Resilience and Social Responsibility, 207–218. New York, NY and Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018.

Wednesday, November 25, 2026: NO CLASS — THANKSGIVING

Class does not meet.

Week 14 (Wednesday, December 2, 2026)

POLICY FOR WORKER OWNERSHIP: INTEGRATING A COOPERATIVE GREEN NEW DEAL

For this session, we will explore the concept of a Cooperative Green New Deal as an instrument to achieve worker ownership and environmental sustainability. Our discussion will be informed by two key readings. First, we'll examine "A Cooperative Green New Deal" by the British Co-operative Party. Following this, we will read Sam Zacher's perspective in "We Need a Green New Deal to Expand Worker Ownership of Our Economy." This article discusses Bernie Sanders and AOC's proposal of expanding worker ownership as a core element of a Green New Deal, arguing for a more equitable and sustainable economic framework.

Required Readings:

Zacher, Sam. "We Need a Green New Deal to Expand Worker Ownership of Our Economy." Jacobin, August 10, 2020.

The Co-operative Party. n.d. A Co-operative Green New Deal: Climate Change, Energy and the Environment Policy Paper. United Kingdom: The Co-operative Party. PDF, 32 pp.

Week 15 (Wednesday, December 9, 2026)

REFLECTION AND SYNTHESIS OF LEARNINGS: CLOSING CIRCLE + WHAT WE TAKE WITH US

For our final session, we'll gather to reflect on what has already shifted—in our thinking, our networks, and our sense of what's possible. We'll open with a short reflective prompt: *What's one idea, encounter, or insight from this course that changed how you think about AI and cooperation?*

From there, we'll move into a closing circle, where each participant is invited (but not required) to share a brief reflection—something they learned, struggled with, or will carry forward. This is not about a shiny performance, but a chance to honor the journey of the past 15 weeks, across backgrounds, sectors, and geographies.

Next, we'll surface collective intentions: What do we want to do with what we've learned? Are there projects to support, research to continue, ideas to carry into our workplaces or communities? We'll map these on a shared digital board, inviting ongoing connection beyond the course.

We'll close with a few final words—not as conclusions, but as invitations to continue the learning and practice. This session is not just the end of a class; it's a moment to recognize that we are already part of a growing network of people working to shape AI otherwise.

Wednesday, December 16, 2026: Makeup Session

This session is designated as a makeup session for completing papers, responses, and outstanding work.

Required Materials and Expenses

All required reading materials, including PDFs, and audio resources, such as MP3s, are provided free of charge. There are no costs associated with this course.

Participation and Certification

This course is non-graded and open to community participants from diverse backgrounds. To receive a certificate of completion, participants are expected to:

- Attend at least 12 of the 15 live sessions
- Complete the required readings for each session
- Actively participate in discussions, breakout groups, and collaborative activities

There are no formal assignments or graded submissions. However, participants are welcome to write reflections, draft manifestos, or engage in peer exchanges of those texts throughout the course. Those who contribute meaningfully to the learning community—through presence, preparation, and thoughtful engagement—will receive a certificate recognizing their participation.

Title IX Policy

The New School is committed to creating and sustaining an environment where students, faculty, and staff can study, work, and thrive unhampered by discrimination or harassment. This website intends to raise awareness and provide information, support, and resources to anyone in the community seeking assistance and education.

This website can offer assistance to community members affected by sexual harassment or any other form of sexual violence, regardless of whether any formal administrative or criminal process is initiated.